

**Remarks by U.S. Embassy Charge d’Affaires Margaret B. Diop  
At the ribbon cutting ceremony of the Tobago Emergency Management  
Agency Early Warning System  
Fort King George Park, Tobago  
Thursday, June 11, 2105 11:00**

Chief Secretary of the Tobago House of Assembly, Orville London...

Director of the Tobago Emergency Management Agency, Allen Stewart...

Distinguished guests, members of the media, colleagues and friends...

I am so happy to be here today in this beautiful place to celebrate the strong partnership we have between the U.S. Government and the Tobago House of Assembly, TEMA and the people of Tobago.

None of this would have been possible without the tireless efforts of Tricia Ortega of our Military Liaison Office. Thanks to Tricia for making it happen from our end!

Disaster preparedness is all about protecting people, and putting them first. And that’s what we are doing with the installation of the Early Warning Sirens. Allen Stewart has spoken quite eloquently about how the system works, and how it will bring Tobago up to world standards in disaster preparedness. I wanted to speak a little about why the U.S. Government, through the regional military command

Southcom and our Embassy, has supported this initiative, and why it's important for us that the people of Tobago are safe.

Before I really get started, I just have to say what a pleasure it is working with the Tobago House of Assembly and TEMA. I just had a very interesting discussion with the Chief Secretary about the various challenges you face here, and how the U.S. government can continue to work closely with you all.

And the folks at TEMA are nothing short of phenomenal. Their organizational and planning skills give me a great deal of confidence that if disaster does strike here—which I pray will never happen—the people of Tobago will be in good hands.

Because TEMA understands the importance of communication in times of emergency. That's what this program is all about. The early warning system will allow Allan and his team to communicate directly with people all over this island, giving them vital information and timely warning.

Over the years, we have learned that communication is vital in disaster response. When we have succeeded in mitigating disaster, it's often because of strong

communication networks, and good communication practices. But when communication breaks down, disasters can become tragedies.

We've learned those lessons, sometimes the hard way. And we want to share that knowledge and experience with others.

So, back in 2013 our Military Liaison Office from the embassy met with TEMA to find ways to improve their capacity to provide essential services, including responding to disasters, other crises and reinforcing sustainable stability.

TEMA identified the need for two early warning sirens compatible with their existing system, as a way to enhance their disaster mitigation and prevention efforts. Our Military Liaison made a request to SOUTHCOM to purchase the systems.

Both sirens were purchased by the United States Government at a cost of \$28,000 U.S. from the American Signal Corporation in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. This was the same vendor used by TEMA for their current system. These E-Class high powered configurable voice sirens were shipped to Trinidad then to Tobago this February, with TEMA paying shipping and installation costs.

We do programs like this throughout the world. In the Caribbean and Latin America, SOUTHCOM's Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Preparedness program is a great tool for achieving U.S. security objectives in the region, specifically, to ensure security, enhance stability, and enable partnership.

Our Agency for International Development USAID, the U.S. military through the regional commands like Southcom, and of course our Embassies all over the world help other countries respond to natural disasters. Whether it's the tsunami in the Indian Ocean, or earthquake in Haiti, the U.S. Government, working with other governments and international agencies, has helped save lives, restore communities, and mitigate the impact of natural disasters.

Why do we do this?

First, and most important, because it's the right thing to do. When you see people in need, you want to help.

But also because it makes sense for us strategically. Preparing for natural disasters, whether they are immediate like a tsunami, or gradual like climate

change, can mitigate harm. Natural disasters have human, economic, social and political costs. So by helping our friends be better prepared for disaster, we are investing in our shared future by reducing risks we face together.

Back in 1770, when this fort was first built, the American colonies—which our country was at the time—might not even have learned about a natural disaster in Tobago until months after it occurred.

Now, with the world much smaller and interconnected, we feel the impact of events far away. We see the pain and devastation and want to help. We want to prevent suffering to the extent that we can. Because we live here together, in a world that is full of beauty and promise, but can also, at times, be dangerous. We all want the same things. And the more we work together and look out for each other, the safer our world will be.

Thank you...

